

40 County plans on Leavitt's area visit

■ EPA director due to tour area May 26

The Lincoln County Commissioners were working on plans this week for a visit from Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Mike Leavitt scheduled for Wednesday, May 26.

The commissioners met with local EPA representatives Jim Christiansen and Wendy Thomi on Wednesday to discuss Leavitt's visit. Christiansen said his understanding of Leavitt's plans is that Leavitt will travel to Kalispell on May 25 and have dinner with U.S. Sen. Max Baucus, then travel to Libby the following morning.

During his time in Libby, Leavitt will meet with public officials, visit the Center for Asbestos Related Disease and hold a public meeting at Libby High School. He plans to leave Libby by 2 p.m.

The meeting at the high school is expected to be tightly structured, Commissioner John Konzen said.

"I think they're trying to keep it focused on the issues and not on all the other things that could go on," he said.

Konzen said he would like to stress to Leavitt the importance of keeping the Libby cleanup on something close to the original timeframe and not letting the work drag on for a dozen or more years.

"Then what happens to us after that?" Konzen said. "How do we get the word out that we're a clean and healthy community?"

Commissioner Rita Windom said Leavitt needs to understand local desires to have properties – especially commercial sites such as the former Stimson mill property now operated as an industrial park by the county port authority – removed from the Superfund list as they are cleaned of asbestos-contaminated vermiculite.

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to discuss Leavitt's visit further during a conference call on Thursday with representatives of U.S. senators Max Baucus and Conrad Burns, U.S. Rep. Denny Rehberg and Gov. Judy Martz.

During confirmation hearings last September following his nomination to head the EPA, Leavitt promised to visit Libby if he became the agency's administrator.

"I'm concerned that we're missing some opportunities because we can't say that this property is clean," she said.

Christiansen said he has been getting promising feedback on the restoration on some of the funding shortfalls in the Libby cleanup budget. He was optimistic that Leavitt might have something positive to say during his visit.

"Basically I have a feeling that he'll have good things to say, but we'll have to wait," he said.

The commissioners were scheduled

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